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ABSTRACT

These materials were developed for use in a "Survey of the Far East" course offered at Mount Vernon Nazarene College, Mount Vernon, Ohio. This curriculum project focuses on the "Bhagavad Gita," with reference to its influence on and use by Mahatma Gandhi. The "Gita" may be used as a text, or may be included on a required readings list. This project consists of three components. An outline describes the succession crisis that provided the background for the conflict at the heart of the "Gita." This outline may be copied for class hand-outs or made into a transparency, or both. (2) Selections are provided from each of the "Gita's" 18 books. These passages are intended to generate class discussion and are designed to be used as class hand-outs or transparencies or both. (3) A list of suggested journal questions or entries are offered as examples. The course for which this project was designed requires students to keep a journal. (4) A working bibliography of 13 items concludes the document. (AS)

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Gandhi and the Gita

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Gandhi and The Gita

Synopsis:

The purpose of this curriculum project was to develop materials for use in 68-203G, Survey of the Far East, offered annually at Mount Vernon Nazarene College. *The Bhagavad Gita* became a focal point for the following reasons:

1. *The Gita* raises an ethical dilemma not unfamiliar to Western civilization; i.e., How does the righteous man reconcile conflicts of allegiance? What guidelines are available when man must choose between two difficult choices or conflicting duties?

2. Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged his debt to *The Gita* in developing his practice of *satyagraha* but his interpretation differs from orthodox Hindu views in some respects, and he attempted to universalize *The Gita*

3. In terms of manageability, *The Gita* makes a suitable text, or it may be included on a required readings list.

This curriculum project consists of the following materials:

(1) An outline of the succession crisis which provided the background for the conflict at the heart of *The Gita*. This outline may be copied for class hand-outs or made into a transparency, or both.

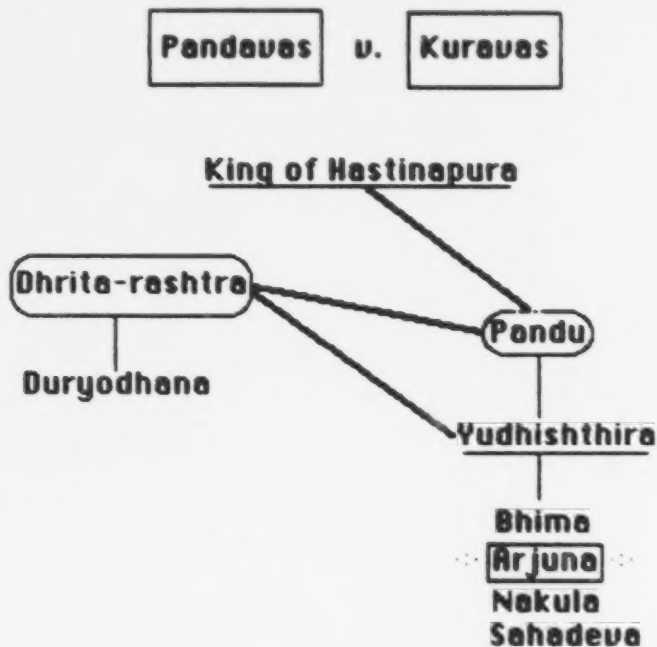
(2) Selections from each of *The Gita's* 18 books. These passages are good for generating class discussion. They are designed to be used as class hand-outs or transparencies or both.

(3) A list of suggested journal questions or entries. It should be noted that the course for which this project was specifically designed includes a requirement that students keep a journal.

(4) Working Bibliography.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Relation to the MAHABHARATA



Succession Crisis:

1. Succession passed to Pandu because Dhritra-rashtra was blind.
2. When Pandu died, Dhritra-rashtra appointed Yudhishtira as heir-apparent rather than Duryodhana (Incarnation of evil.)
3. Arjuna's dilemma in deciding to fight against kin.

Arjuna = Soul of Man

Krishna = Charlioteer of the Soul

...The Gita is Arjuna's search for direction in the midst of an ethical dilemma.

[Source: *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. by Juan Mascaro.
N.Y.: Penguin, 1962; hereafter, Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 1

26-28

**Then Arjuna saw in both armies fathers, grandfathers, sons, grandsons;
fathers of wives, uncles, masters; brothers, companions and friends.**

**When Arjuna thus saw his kinsmen face to face in both lines of battle, he
was overcome by grief and despair and thus he spoke with a sinking heart.
[45]**

35

**These I do not wish to slay, even if I myself am slain. Not even for the
kingdom of the three worlds: how much less for a kingdom of the earth!
[46]**

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 2

11

...The wise grieve not for those who live; and they grieve not for those who die--for life and death shall pass away. [49]

19

If any man thinks he slays, and if another thinks he is slain, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die. [50]

31

Think thou also of thy duty and do not waver. There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in a righteous war. [51]

38

Prepare for war with peace in thy soul. Be in peace in pleasure and pain, in gain and in loss, in victory or in the loss of a battle. In this peace there is no sin. [51]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 3

4

Not by refraining from action does man attain freedom from action. Not by mere renunciation does he attain supreme perfection. [56]

9

...Let thy actions then be pure, free from the bonds of desire. [57]

35

And do thy duty, even if it be humble, rather than another's, even if it be great. To die in one's duty is life: to live in another's is death. [59]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 4

11

In any way that men love me in that same way they find my love: for many are the paths of men, but they all in the end come to me. [62]

33

...For wisdom is in truth the end of all holy work. [64]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 5

5

...That man sees indeed the truth who sees that vision and creation are one.
[66]

22

For the pleasures that come from the world bear in them sorrows to come.
They come and they go, they are transient: not in them do the wise find joy.
[68]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 6

46

Be thou a Yogi, Arjuna! Because the Yogi goes beyond those who only follow the path of the austere, or of wisdom, or of work.

47

And the greatest of all Yogis is he who with all his soul has faith, and he who with all his soul loves me. [73]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 7

4

The visible forms of my nature are eight: earth, water, fire, air, ether; the mind, reason, and the sense of 'I.'

5

But beyond my visible nature is my invisible spirit. This is the fountain of life whereby this universe has its being. [74]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 8

1

Who is Brahman? Who is Atman? And what is Karma, Spirit Supreme?
What is the Kingdom of the earth? And what is the Kingdom of Light? [77]

3

Brahman is the Supreme, the Eternal. Atman is his Spirit in man. Karma is the force of creation, wherefrom all things have their life.

4

Matter is the Kingdom of the earth, which in time passes away; but the Spirit is the Kingdom of Light... [77]

26

These are the two paths that are for ever: the path of light and the path of darkness. The one leads to the land of never-returning: the other returns to sorrow. [79]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 9

34

Give me thy mind and give me thy heart, give me thy offerings and thy adoration; and thus with thy soul in harmony, and making me thy goal supreme, thou shalt in truth come to me. [83]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 10

32

I am the beginning and the middle and the end of all that is. Of all knowledge I am the knowledge of the soul. Of the many paths of reason I am the one that leads to Truth. [87]

42

But of what help is it to thee to know this diversity? Know that with one single fraction of my Being I pervade and support the universe, and know that I AM. [88]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 11

32

...Even if thou dost not fight, all the warriors facing thee shall die.

33

Arise therefore! Win thy glory, conquer thine enemies, and enjoy thy kingdom. Through the fate of their karma I have doomed them to die: be thou merely the means of my work. [92]

34

Only by love can men see me, and know me, and come unto me. [95]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 12

16

He who is free from vain expectations, who is pure, who is wise and knows what to do, who in inner peace watches both sides, who shakes not, who works for God and not for himself--this man loves me, and he is dear to me.
[97]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 13

2

**Know that I am the knower in all the fields of my creation; and that the wisdom which sees the field and the knower of the field is true wisdom.
[99]**

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 14

5

SATTVA = Light

RAJAS = Fire

TAMAS = Darkness

[103]

21

**How is the man known who has gone beyond the three powers of nature?
What is his path; and how does he transcend the three? [105]**

26

**And he who with never-failing love adores me and works for me, he passes
beyond the three powers and can be one with Brahman, the ONE. [105]**

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 15

19

He who with a clear vision sees me as the Spirit Supreme he knows all there is to be known, and he adores me with all his soul. [108]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 16

1

Freedom from fear, purity of heart, constancy in sacred learning and contemplation, generosity, self-harmony, adoration, study of the scriptures, austerity, righteousness;

2

Non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all beings, peace from greedy cravings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness;

3

Energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride--these are the treasures of the man who is born for heaven.

4

Deceitfulness, insolence and self-conceit, anger and harshness and ignorance--these belong to a man who is born for hell. [109]

21

Three are the gates to this hell, the death of the soul: the gate of lust, the gate of wrath, and the gate of greed. Let a man shun the three. [111]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 17

20

A gift is pure when it is given from the heart to the right person at the right time and at the right place, and when we expect nothing in return. [113]

24

Therefore with the word OM the lovers of Brahman begin all work of sacrifice, gift or self-harmony, done according to the Scriptures.

25

And with the word TAT, and with renunciation of all reward, this same work of sacrifice, gift or self-harmony is being done by those seekers of Infinite Liberty.

26

SAT is what is good and what is true: when therefore a work is well done the end of that work is SAT.

27

Constant faithfulness in sacrifice, gift, or self-harmony is SAT; and also all work consecrated to Brahman.

28

But work done without faith is ASAT, is nothing: sacrifice, gift, or self-harmony done without faith are nothing, both in this world and in the world to come. [114]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

GITA - Book 18

17

He who is free from the chains of selfishness, and whose mind is free from any ill-will, even if he kills all these warriors he kills them not and he is free. [116]

Works of a *Brahmin* -

peace; self-harmony; austerity and purity; loving-forgiveness and righteousness; vision and wisdom and faith [119]

Works of a *Kshatriya* -

heroic mind, inner fire, constancy, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity and noble leadership [119]

Works of a *Vaisya* -

trade, agriculture, and rearing of cattle [119]

The work of the *Sudra* is service. [119]

45

They all attain perfection when they find joy in their work... [119]

47

Greater is thine own work, even if this be humble, than the work of another, even if this be great. When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can touch this man. [119]

78

Wherever is Krishna, the End of Yoga, wherever is Arjuna who masters the bow, there is beauty and victory, and joy and all righteousness. This is my faith. [122]

[Source: Gita/Penguin]

JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Gandhi's interpretation of *The Gita* differ from standard or orthodox views?
2. How does *The Gita* correspond to the Just War theory of St. Augustine? To pacifism? To civil disobedience?
3. According to Puri's book, Gandhi attempted to reconcile *The Gita* with the Sermon on the Mount. Respond.
4. Analyze *The Gita*. What is your personal response to Arjuna's dilemma?
5. What is the essence of *satyagraha* and how does it correspond to *The Gita*?
6. Gandhi called *The Gita* the "essence of all the *Upanishads*" the "living, life-giving, immortal mother," and a "spiritual dictionary." What is virtue? What is righteous behavior? [See Raghavan Iyer, ed. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. I. *Civilization, Politics, and Religion* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 98-99.]
7. According to Rawlinson, the *Bhagavad Gita* "has been to generations of pious Hindus what *The Imitation of Christ* has been to Christians." Explain.
8. Respond to the following quotation from Galbraith: The essence of *The Gita* is "...duty to defend the right, even if it may appear that the immediate deed, the bloodshed of war, is wrong. The highest good is to uphold the right."

9. According to Wolpert, the central teaching of *The Gita* is "Krishna's explication of the 'discipline of action' (*karma yoga*) path to salvation." How does this fit with Gandhi's interpretation?
10. To what extent is it accurate to assert, as Fischer does that *The Gita's* significance is that it concentrates attention on the purpose of life?

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